20 December 2017

Dear Nicola

Please find our alternative submission to your consultation accessed here: https://oustudents.co/we-are-ou-students in the form of a short film to provide a snapshot of what it looks and feels like to be a student of the Open University.

We don’t believe that government and education policy makers have a clear picture of the reality or diversity of part-time or distance learners. Therefore we would like to use this opportunity to introduce ourselves to the new Office for Students, provide a little insight into student lives and highlight some of the challenges that they face every day. The students featured in this film are those who responded to the Student Association’s call to share their experiences with you, speaking unscripted and from the heart.

Many people are unaware of the extraordinary effort that it takes to be a part-time or distance learner. Our students face the same challenges as any student at any university around the country; meeting deadlines, testing our intellectual capabilities and often pushing ourselves to the limits of our endurance. There are also a number of specific challenges faced by part-time and distance learners.

It is difficult to generalise about the typical OU student. We are in work and out of it. We are parents, carers and cared for. We all share a common belief in the power of learning. In our film you will see students juggling study with a combination of family responsibilities, employment, volunteering, and health and wellbeing needs. Some of us may have left school with few or no qualifications while others are reskilling and upskilling. The achievements of OU graduates prove that we can still succeed as long as there is a university prepared to welcome us.

We want to make sure that the needs of part-time and distance learners are high on the HE agenda, and that our particular circumstances and motivations are understood. To do this, we offer this short explanation of what it means to be an OU Student and the value it adds to lives. Every student story is different and that is what we have attempted to capture in our film, ‘We are #OUsstudents’.

We hope you will find it as moving to watch as we have found it to make.

Kind regards,

Nicola Simpson
President
OU Students Association